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## THE EXHIBITION PICTURE.

ARTISTS and authors have ever been prone to make their first efforts for the attainment of fame and fortune in attic altitudes; a choice which not only offers the advantage of cheapness, but precludes all annoyance from lodgers overhead, to say nothing of unpleasant visits from the landlady underneath, especially where the house happens to be three or four stories high, and the proprietress suffers under the affliction either of asthma or rheumatism. Doubtless, it was for the purpose of securing either one or other of these advantages, that our young artist, Reuben Jessop, took up his abode in the three-pair-front of a house in the retired locality of Pentonville, London. Waiving all ceremony, let us introduce him at breakfast, seated before a scanty fire, suffering his toast and coffee to grow cold while absorbed in scrutinising the merits and imperfections of a half-finished painting that rests on his easel, near the window. It is a fancy sketch, portraying a young female of exquisite beauty, standing at a window open down to the floor, looking out upon a lawn from an apartment elegantly furnished, and displaying a breakfast-table laid in a style that exhibits the most exquisite taste and refinement. It forms a picturesque and fascinating little scene of domestic comfort, rendered doubly interesting by the charming attitude and expression of the female, in whose countenance the artist has happily and strikingly depicted the fond and anxious gaze of a young bride, looking for the return of her loved companion from his morning's ramble. What a contrast to the discomfort and desolation of the poor artist's attic! But such evils were almost entirely overlooked or forgotten by Reuben, whose soul was absorbed in the pursuit of his profession. With this intense devotion, the young artist combined an anxious yearning for fame that impelled him to unwearied study of the rules of his art, which he pursued with an ardour so unremitting as scarcely to allow himself sufficient time for rest; and as "the labour we delight in physics pain," he never felt the want of relaxation.

The following is the incident that had impelled our artist to his present labour. It was on a beautiful day in autumn, when the lingering sunshine, like the farewell of an old friend, seems to console us with the assurance of only temporary absence, that a group of gazers, who had been drawn together by the arrival of a wedding *cortège* at Marylebone church, were clustered together on the pavement waiting to see the bridal party return to their carriages. Twelve o'clock struck, and the number of idlers had increased to such a crowd that many respectable persons stopped also; some because they did not choose to be jostled among a mob, and others in the hope of beholding one or more of those glowing impersonations of female beauty, commonly to be found among the daughters of our gentry and aristocracy. The expectant crowd, among whom was Reuben, had not to wait long ere the wedding party made their appearance. First came the bride and bridegroom, the former so heavily veiled that not only her face but the greater portion of her dress was completely hidden. She was leaning on the arm of her husband, a fine, noble, handsome young man, attired in full military uniform, and accompanied by a veteran officer, the bride's father, a bluff, hearty, jovial-looking old gentleman, whose countenance evinced such delight as fully showed how completely the marriage met with his approval. And now came a troop of bridesmaids, all, not only elegantly attired, but more or less possessed of personal attractions; one especially, the last of the train, a dark, bright-eyed damsel, displaying a countenance so strikingly beautiful as to excite the intense admiration of all the by-standers, and particularly of our artist, who, the instant he beheld the maiden, involuntarily expressed his delight by exclaiming rapturously, "What a perfect Hebe!" There he stood, his eyes intently fixed upon her, as she took her seat in the bridesmaids' carriage, and still he remained rudely staring, and endeavouring to get a parting glance at his idol as the vehicle drove off, a rudeness for which the offender was to be excused by his having found, in that enchanting face and figure, almost a perfect specimen of the style of beauty which constituted one of the most

delightful of his artistic idealities. Scarcely conscious of anything around him, our dreamer pursued his course homewards, and the instant he entered his "eyry home," hurriedly snatched up his sketch-book, and having dashed off a reminiscent outline of the morning's vision, threw himself into a chair, with the dissatisfied feelings of a man who has involved himself in a difficulty beyond the means of extrication; he distrusted his ability to give such a depiction as would be worthy of the original. True, he had long resolved to exert his utmost skill, and endeavour to rise above the rank of a mere portrait-painter; to produce a picture that might raise him above his present poverty and obscurity, by gaining a purchaser among the *virtuosi*, and winning the favourable opinion of the public. Yet even after he had commenced the work we have described, there were moments when a distrust of his ability to give a full and faithful depiction of the beauty of the original he intended to represent as the young bride, came so strongly upon him that he was almost inclined to abandon his attempt; and it was in one of these moods that we find him at the opening of our narrative—suffering under a sad misgiving, amounting almost to a fit of despondency, from which he was aroused by some one knocking at the door of his apartment.

"Come in!" cried he, and, on turning round, beheld the fat figure of Mrs. Sniggins, his landlady, standing before him.

"Have the goodness to take a seat, madam," said Reuben; in compliance with which invitation, the lady, panting with exhaustion, sank into one of the dilapidated chairs which, in conjunction with a rickety table, and broken-legged bedstead, constituted the chief furniture of the attic.

"Them stairs is such a height!" muttered Mrs. Sniggins.

"They are, madam," replied Reuben, in a tone of sympathy, though at the very moment he was wishing that they were at least a story higher.

"And your rent is a running up so, Mr. Jessop," continued his visitor, "and there's the collector threatening to seize upon me for taxes."

"Dear me! what, seize upon you!" exclaimed Reuben, scarcely able to suppress a smile at the idea of so daring a capture.

"Yes; such an exposure to the neighbours, you know, sir," continued Mrs. Sniggins; "when do you think you will be able to let me have some money, sir?"

"Soon after that painting you see yonder is finished, I hope, madam."

"That's a very uncertain chance, I'm afraid, sir; for people has no money to lay out on pictures. But maybe you've got a customer for it already?"

"I wish I could say I had, madam; but I hope to procure one."

"Well, I hope you will, I'm sure, and soon too, though I really cannot wait for that; you must let me have some money this week—you must indeed, if it's only a trifle."

"I'll endeavour, madam."

"Pray do; if you can get me half-a-sovereign, it will materially help me in making up the man's money."

Reuben promised; and saying she should fully rely upon his word, Mrs. Sniggins took her departure. Here was the pressure of poverty, of which he was too prone to be unmindful, stimulating him to the completion of his task; for, in order to keep his promise to Mrs. Sniggins, he would be compelled to borrow from a friend who had kindly offered to assist him with his purse, that he might not be harassed while the picture was in progress.

It was intended for the Royal Academy's ensuing exhibition; and, by slightly availing himself of his friend's generosity, he was enabled to devote so much time to the work, and bestow such great pains upon it, that it was not only completed before the required time, but received the highest encomiums from several first-rate judges of art to whom he submitted it for inspection. Within the time appointed for receiving the contributions of exhibitors it was sent in, and shortly afterwards Reuben received an official communication from the Academy, informing him that it had been accepted.